DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 585 CG 023 578

AUTHOR Burdsal, Jeanne
TITLE The Relationship between Major Life Events and the Potential for Child Abuse.
PUB DATE 11 Apr 91
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Southwestern Psychological Association (37th, New Orleans, LA, April 11-13, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *At Risk Persons; *Child Abuse; Death; Divorce; *Life Events; Marriage; *Parent Child Relationship; Parents; Poverty; Pregnancy; Socioeconomic Status; Stress Variables

ABSTRACT

High risk parenting and child abuse are the consequences of multiple and interactive factors. The occurrence of major life events such as death, divorce, marriage, and pregnancy frequently presents stressors that may ignite an already volatile family situation. This study was conducted to examine the incidence of reported major life events in families determined to be at-risk for abuse/neglect and the relationship of the life event scores to the Abuse Score and subscale scores on the Child Abuse Potential (CAP) Inventory and selected demographic variables. At-risk parents (N=24) completed the CAP Inventory and the Life Events Scale. The findings revealed that a substantial number of the subjects had experienced more than one serious life event, such as deaths of family members, jail sentences, serious illnesses, and divorces during the previous year. The overall Abuse Score as well as the Distress and Unhappiness subscales of the CAP Inventory had significant correlations with the Life Events Score (LES). The parent's educational level had a significant correlation with the LES. Findings were used by staff members at a Head Start parent education program to plan and augment the curriculum. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED335585

The Relationship Between Major Life Events and the Potential for Child Abuse

Jeanne Burdsal

Wichita State University

CG023578

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jeanne P. Burdsal

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented at the Southwestern Psychological Assn. Convention

New Orleans, LA; April 11, 1991

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

High risk parenting and child abuse are the consequence of multiple and interactive factors. While incidents of child abuse are not restricted to any particular socioeconomic class, a higher than average number of reported cases is found among families living at or near the poverty level. These families are often stressed by the daily hassles of trying to subsist with limited resources. The occurrence of major life events such as death, divorce, marriage, and pregnancy frequently present as stressors that may ignite an already volatile family situation. This study examines the incidence of reported major life events in families determined to be at-risk for abuse/neglect and the relationship of the life event scores to the Abuse Score and subscale scores on the Child Abuse Potential (CAP) Inventory and selected demographic variables.

The Wichita Head Start program operates a parent education program that serves families identified to be at-risk for abuse and neglect concerns. Families are referred to the program from human service agencies within the community such as the health department, Child Protective Services, or the courts. The enrolled child(ren) receive all of the traditional Head Start services that are available to all families who participate in Head Start. In addition, the parents of children enrolled in this program are required to attend a parenting skills class for three hours once a week. As part of program planning and evaluation, families routinely complete the Child Abuse Potential (CAP) Inventory (Milner, 1986) and the Holmes and Rahe Life Events Scale (1967).

Thirty-four parents, enrolled in the Resource Center for Parents and Children for the 1987-88 school year completed the CAP Inventory and the Life Events Scale during the second week of the program. The demographic characteristics of the parent group are summarized in Table 1.

Of the 34 CAP Inventories completed by the parents, 24 of the inventories met Milner's (1986) criteria as a valid protocol and were retained for additional analysis. The primary basis for exclusion from analysis was the presence of one or more elevated validity indices. Table 2 summarizes the mean CAP abuse score, CAP subscale scores, and the Life Events Score for the 24 parents whose protocols were used in the analysis.

It was noted that a substantial number of the families in this group had experienced more than one serious life event, such as deaths of family members, jail sentences, serious illnesses, and divorces during the previous year. Because of the number of such events, it was decided to undertake a closer examination of

the relationship of these events to the potential for abuse score on the CAP Inventory. An analysis of the data was completed using Pearson Product Moment correlations between the Life Events Score (LES) and the scores on the subscales on the CAP Inventory as well as the overall potential for abuse score. It was found that the overall Abuse Score as well as the Distress and Unhappiness subscales had significant correlations with the LES. Additional correlations between the LES and the demographic variables were also completed. The parent's education level was found to have a significant correlation with the LES. The results of the these analyses are summarized in Table 3.

One of the primary objectives of the parent education program at the Resource Center for Parents and Children is to teach parents more effective methods of coping with their stress. Information about specific problems such as the legal aspects of divorce proceedings and where to obtain free or low cost legal aid or a discussion about the kinds of feelings one may experience while caring for a family member during a serious or terminal illness often alleviate some stress in that parents realize that their situation or feelings are not unique. Because many of the parents are socially isolated, the group experience with other parents has frequently led to parents forming social support networks within the group.

Staff members use the specific information from the assessments to plan and augment the curriculum. Part of the planning includes inviting staff from other human service agencies in the community to meet with the parent groups to discuss what resources are available.

TABLE 1

Demographic Variables of the Parents Enrolled in the Resource Center Program for the 1987 - 88 School Year

M Age	27.0 yr. (range 20 - 41 yrs) SD = 5.2	
M Education Level	11.06 years (2 - 14 yrs completed) SD = 2.0	
Gender	Female	94%
	Male	6%
Ethnic/Racial Background	Black	29%
	Hispanic	9%
	N. American	3%
	White	59%
Marital Status	Single	67%
	Married	33%
M Number Children	2.6 Children (range 1 - 7 children) SD = 1.3	

N = 34

TABLE 2

Mean Scores for the CAP Abuse and Subscales Scores and the Life Event Score for 24 Parents

SCALE	M Score	SD
CAP Abuse	227.4	95.1
CAP Distress	145.0	71.7
CAP Rigidity	19.8	3.7
CAP Unhappiness	17.7	2.2
CAP Prob. Self/Child	10.2	7.2
CAP Problem Family	19.8	3.8
CAP Problem Others	15.0	7.7
Life Events Score	266.1	25.5

N = 24

TABLE 3

Results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlations of the LES with the CAP Scales and Demographic Variables

Variable	Pearson Corr.	P
CAP Abuse Score	.415	.04
CAP Distress	.427	.04
CAP Rigidity	-.102	.64
CAP Unhappiness	.414	.04
CAP Prob. Child/Self	.043	.84
CAP Problem Family	.349	.10
CAP Problem Others	.011	.96
Age	-.198	.39
Ethnic Background	.363	.10
Marital Status	.063	.79
Number of Children	-.152	.51
Education Level	-.524	.01

N = 24 d = 22

References

Holmes, T.H., & Rahe, R.H. (1967). The social readjustment rating scale. Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 11, 213-218.

Milner, J.S. (1986). The child abuse potential inventory: Manual (2nd ed.). Webster, NC: Psytec Corporation